

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First United Presbyterian Church

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 321 N. Jackson St

N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town Athens

N/A ☐ vicinity

state Tennessee

code TN

county McMinn

code 107

zip code 37303

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

E. Patrick McHenry
Signature of certifying official/Title

6-02-07
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other,

(explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

First United Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

McMinn County, TN
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | 0 | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 1 | 0 | Total |

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/ religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/ religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Glass; Tin

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

First United Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

McMinn County, TN
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Ethnic Heritage: African American
Social History

Period of Significance

1892-1958

Significant Dates

1892, 1925

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Sherman, Rodger; Logan, Dave; McKeldin, George;
Henderson, George, builders

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other
- Name of repository:
Cleveland, TN Library (History Branch)

First United Presbyterian Church
Name of Property

McMinn County, TN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.3 acre Athens, TN 125 NE

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 718165 3925025
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paul Archambault / Historic Preservation Planner
organization Southeast Tennessee Development District date 2/01/ 2008
street & number P.O. Box 4757 telephone (423) 424-4266
city or town Chattanooga state TN zip code 37405

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name The Presbytery of East Tennessee/ Steve Benz, Executive Presbyter
street & number P.O. Box 5436 telephone 865-688-5581
city or town Knoxville state TN zip code 37928-0436

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1First United Presbyterian Church
McMinn County, TN

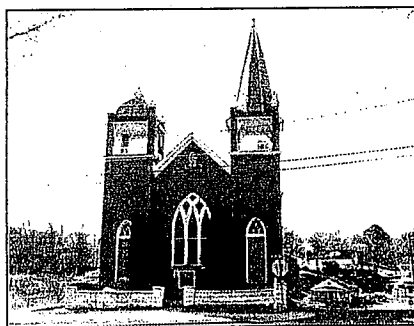
VII. Description

The First United Presbyterian Church is located at 321 North Jackson Street in Athens (pop. 13,334), McMinn County, Tennessee. The church is located at the intersection of Jackson Street and Roy Street on a downward sloping parcel of land and faces east toward the campus of Tennessee Wesleyan University. It is rectangular in plan with a gable roof that is flanked by square towers on both sides. Constructed in 1892, the late Gothic Revival brick building rests on a stone foundation. The gabled roof is covered with asphalt shingles and the two square tower steeples are capped with decorative tin sheets. The exterior walls are sectioned by two tiered engaged buttresses and the American bond brickwork has a header course for each seven courses of stretchers. All of the pointed arch windows feature original, multi-colored stained glass windows with wood tracery and are outlined by brick voussoirs. The church has had very few alterations and has a high level of integrity.

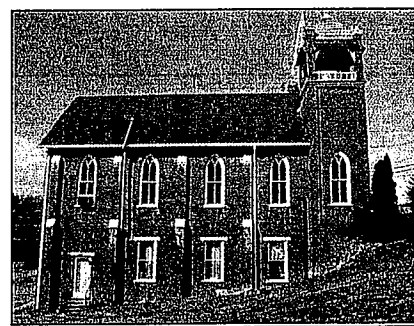
The east facade faces North Jackson Street and features a turn-of-the century stone wall at the front of the building's property. There are corner towers of equal height on each end of the façade. They feature decorative brickwork with two rows of recessed brick headers and a row of vertical stretchers in the center on all four sides. Brick corbelling is present underneath the belfry openings. Each tower shelters matching square narthex reception areas. Short walks from the sidewalk lead to both church entrances where they feature pointed arch entryways that include three sectioned stained glass windows with wood tracery over original, nine-paneled wood doors.



North Elevation (Roy St)



East Façade (N. Jackson St)



South Elevation

The southeast tower's belfry is covered by a rounded, decorative tin roof that is supported by four brick pillars. Decorative metal caps are on the top of the brick pillars and at the apex of the roof. Opposite, the northeast tower houses the bell and is covered by an octagonal-shaped steeple, which is covered by decorative tin sheets. An iron wind gauge rests on the tower's pinnacle. Original wood arch supports and original wood railings are present on all sides underneath both of the tower roofs. In addition, both towers include pointed arch, stained glass, double-hung sash windows with wood tracery at their bases.

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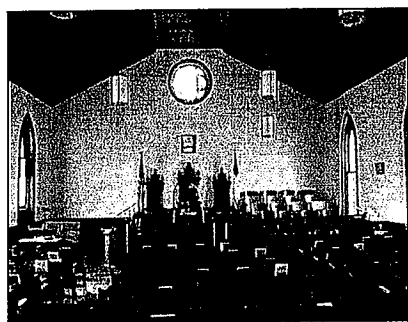
First United Presbyterian Church
McMinn County, TN

Centered in the east facade between the corner towers is a large three section stained glass window allowing light into the interior nave. This wood framed window has wood tracery forming three diamond shaped panes in its pointed arch. Above and on either side of the window is decorative brickwork with two rows of recessed brick headers and a row of vertical stretchers. Centered below the gable roof eave is a decorative pointed arch panel filled with seashells. Brick corbelling is located directly underneath the panel.

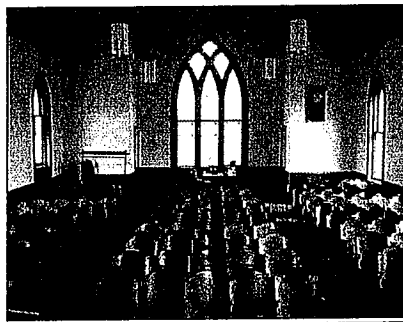
The south elevation features four, stained glass, double-hung sash windows with wood tracery on the main floor level; three, one-over-one double-hung sash windows with wood lintels on the basement level; and four, two-tiered brick engaged buttresses. The buttresses act as wall supports and are a decorative element of Gothic Revival influenced structures. In addition, a four-paneled wood door with a wood lintel is located at the rear of the south elevation on the basement level.

The north elevation, facing Roy Street, features four, stained glass, double-hung sash windows with wood tracery on the main floor level; four, one-over-one double-hung sash windows with wood lintels on the basement level; and four, two-tiered brick buttresses. An original, four-paneled wood door with a three-light transom and wood lintel is located between the third and fourth window on the basement level.

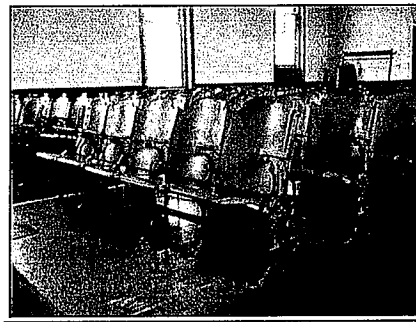
The west (rear) elevation faces Church Street and features a round multi-colored stained glass window with wood tracery. The window is centered directly underneath the gabled eave.



Sanctuary and Pulpit



Sanctuary and Nave Window



Opera Style Seats

The interior floor plan is rectangular and its dimensions are 40'x 60'. Its primary interior features include original opera-style seats, wood wainscoting, a lofty three-sectioned stained glass window in the nave, and multi-colored stained glass windows on the north and south walls of the sanctuary. The present light fixtures were installed when the church was renovated in the 1950s.

The two separate entrances of the church open into the narrow rectangular nave. Both entrances into the nave include original, wood paneled doors. The southeast entrance, no longer in use, was recently converted into a stairwell to the community room in the basement. Located on the nave's

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First United Presbyterian Church
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east wall, is an original, three-sectioned stained glass window with wood tracery. The nave opens into the sanctuary where 150 opera-style seats are situated in 3 sections of 50 each. Two carpeted aisles, covering the original wood floor, run on both sides of the center section of seats. Multi-colored stained glass windows are located on the north and south walls in the sanctuary. The pulpit and original choir box are located at the west end of the sanctuary. The choir box has sixteen seats and a wood railing with turned wood balusters. Centered on the upper end of the west wall is a round multi-colored stained glass window with wood tracery.

Interior finishing details are consistently fine and represent the best of elaborate millwork produced in the local mills. All around the base of the sanctuary walls is a three-and-one-half foot wood wainscot of vertical beaded strips with a wide molded chair rail above and resting on a broad wood base. The walls above the wainscot are all smooth painted plaster. The original ceiling construction features stained wood with rounded and beaded ribs, with a pattern of triangles and rectangles in the center section of the ceiling. Very few alterations have occurred to the structure since its construction in 1892 and there have been no additions to the edifice, as it has retained a majority of its original physical characteristics.

The church's community room is located in the basement, which was renovated in the 1950s and again in 2006. Work in the basement included the addition of restrooms, a kitchen, and three gas furnaces to heat both floors.¹ The community room has a stage located along the east wall with a converted office located to the south and a storage closet to the north. The center of the room features a 20x20 section of open space for church and community events. The kitchen is located in the southwest corner and the restrooms are located in the northwest corner of the room. The south wall in the basement features three, one-over-one double-hung sash windows and a four-panel wood door. Opposite, the north wall includes four, one-over-one double-hung windows with a four-panel door with a three-light transom.

¹ W.E. Nash. "History of the First United Presbyterian Church, Athens, TN." P. 3, 1989.

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McMinn County, TN

VIII. Statement of Significance

The First United Presbyterian Church, built circa 1892, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its locally significant associations with African American ethnic heritage and social history. It is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion C because it represents the late Gothic Revival Style that was prevalent among religious institutions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The nominated property served as a community center for African Americans in McMinn County and also served as a temporary school for African American children from 1925-1926.

After the Civil War, former slaves throughout the South were searching for a new identity and looked for a place that would offer them some form of training and education so they could develop the necessary skills to be successful and attain status. Many blacks began to create their own institutions where they could learn and care for each other. The primary community center for African Americans was the church. In Athens, a group of free African Americans in the antebellum era, created a community called the "Free Hill" Society. In 1865, led by Reverend William Heyward Ferguson, African Americans worshipped at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, located near the intersection of North Jackson Street and Highway 30 in Athens. Shortly after the Civil War, in 1866, the Beth Salem Community, a group of newly emancipated slaves located southeast of Athens, began their congregation and church known as the Beth Salem Presbyterian Church (NR 6/22/2000).

The First United Presbyterian Church of Athens, Tennessee, organized their congregation in 1889 in a dance hall building, located on the corner of North White Street and Roy Street where the present church building sits today. In 1890, Reverend Jacob Lincoln Cook, a native of Athens, began the United Presbyterian mission in the dance hall building. Mr. J.L. Cook was born in Athens in 1870 and was the son of former slaves, George and Amelia Cook. He received his bachelor's degree from Knoxville College (NR 3/12/1998) in 1888 and entered the Allegheny Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to prepare for the Presbyterian ministry. After becoming an ordained minister and beginning his mission, the African American community was in need of a larger building for worship.²

The late Gothic Revival First Presbyterian Church building was constructed by some of its charter members and early founders in 1892 for the congregation and Rev. Cook's mission. The 40' x 60' brick building, erected by Rodger Sherman, Dave Logan, George McKeldin, and George Henderson, represents the late 19th and early 20th century African American craftsmanship, which followed the tradition of their enslaved ancestors' building techniques. The brick masonry on the

² Cook, J. Lawrence. "An Autobiography of the Early Years, 1899-1922". 1999. Available at: <http://www.doctorjazz.co.uk/page16.html>. Accessed January 2008.

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exterior of the building and the stone wall masonry along the front entrance of the church are excellent examples of this building tradition.³

The First United Presbyterian Church, through the Freedman's Board, assisted with the establishment of the Athens Mission for the Colored People. The board contributed \$2,000-\$2,500 annually to the mission, which was among 80 missions in the South. During a time when blacks had limited opportunities, these missions, typically in churches, provided a safe haven for African Americans who needed shelter, strength, and a Christian brotherhood and sisterhood network.⁴

Soon after the establishment of the mission and the construction of the new church building, Reverend Jacob Cook, along with fellow mission workers Henrietta Mason, Mary Byars, Fannie Jackson, James Cleage, and Professor Pitts, organized the Athens Academy, which was a three-room building located on Depot Hill across the street from the church. The Athens Academy provided great learning opportunities for black students in the Athens area and East Tennessee region. The school was established from funds of the United Presbyterian Church and the Freedman's Board. The academy, "places an education within the reach of young people of limited means." Due to the great success of the school, a new school building, twice the size of the first building, was constructed on the corner of North Jackson Street and Green Street. The Athens Academy became recognized as one of best schools for African Americans in the South.⁵

Reverend J.L. Cook continued to serve as pastor of the First United Presbyterian Church and principal of the Athens Academy until 1900, when he moved to the Henderson Institute in Henderson, North Carolina. He died two years later, but left an impact over the church, mission, and the academy. In fact, young men involved in the academy, like the Cleage brothers, went on to establish United Presbyterian Churches in Detroit and Indianapolis.⁶

After Cook left in 1900, the church saw four more pastors take over during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Rev. John Arter, Rev. D.F. White, Rev. John Brice, and Rev. C.H. Wilson all served as pastors of the First United Presbyterian Church and principals of the Athens Academy.⁷ For a short time, from 1925-1926, the First United Presbyterian Church was used as a school when the Athens Academy was destroyed by a fire. A new school opened in December of 1926 with funds from McMinn County, the City of Athens, and the Julius Rosenwald fund, which provided funds for African American schools in the rural South. The Athens Training School, as it was known, had nine grades, 150 students, and included six classrooms, and an auditorium. Professor W. E. Nash, a teacher at Athens Academy and member of First United Presbyterian Church, became the school's first principal and served until 1953 when Professor E. Harper

³ Nash. P. 2.

⁴ "The Athens Academy," *Athens Daily Post*, 1901 special edition. Athens Daily Post Microfilm: Feb. 1859-July 1920, Box 7, Cleveland, TN History Library.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cook, An Autobiography of the Early Years, 1899-1922. 1999.

⁷ Delores Johnson. First United Presbyterian Church of Athens, TN Manuscript to Paul Archambault, December, 2006.

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Johnson succeeded him. The school's name was eventually changed to the "J.L. Cook School" to honor the spirit and work of the late reverend. It closed in the mid-1960s during the desegregation of southern schools.⁸

Reverend C.H. Wilson, who took over as pastor of the First United Presbyterian Church in 1911, served in his position for nearly 50 years. In addition, Mr. Wilson served as the principal of the Athens Academy from 1911-1926. His longstanding service to the church, mission, school, and the African American community in Athens was a testament to the early works of Rev. J.L. Cook and the importance of the church as a community center.⁹ During his tenure (1911-1958) church membership increased, which led to renovations in the church's basement.

The church merged with the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1983 and was served by student pastors from the Johnson C. Smith Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. In the late 1980s, the church merged with the East Tennessee Presbytery and continues to worship with a congregation of approximately thirty people.¹⁰ The First United Presbyterian Church serves as one of the few remaining late Gothic Revival church buildings in McMinn County. The church, for over one hundred years, has been of great service to the community and it continues to represent African American culture and religion in Athens and McMinn County.

⁸ Cook, An Autobiography of the Early Years, 1899-1922. 1999.

⁹ Johnson, Delores. First United Presbyterian Church of Athens, TN Manuscript to Paul Archambault, December, 2006.

¹⁰ Nash. P. 2.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cook, J. Lawrence. "An Autobiography of the Early Years, 1899-1922". 1999. Available at:
<http://www.doctorjazz.co.uk/page16.html>. Accessed January 2008.

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Archambault, December, 2006.

Nash, W. E. "History of the First United Presbyterian Church, Athens, Tennessee". (Unpublished).
1989.

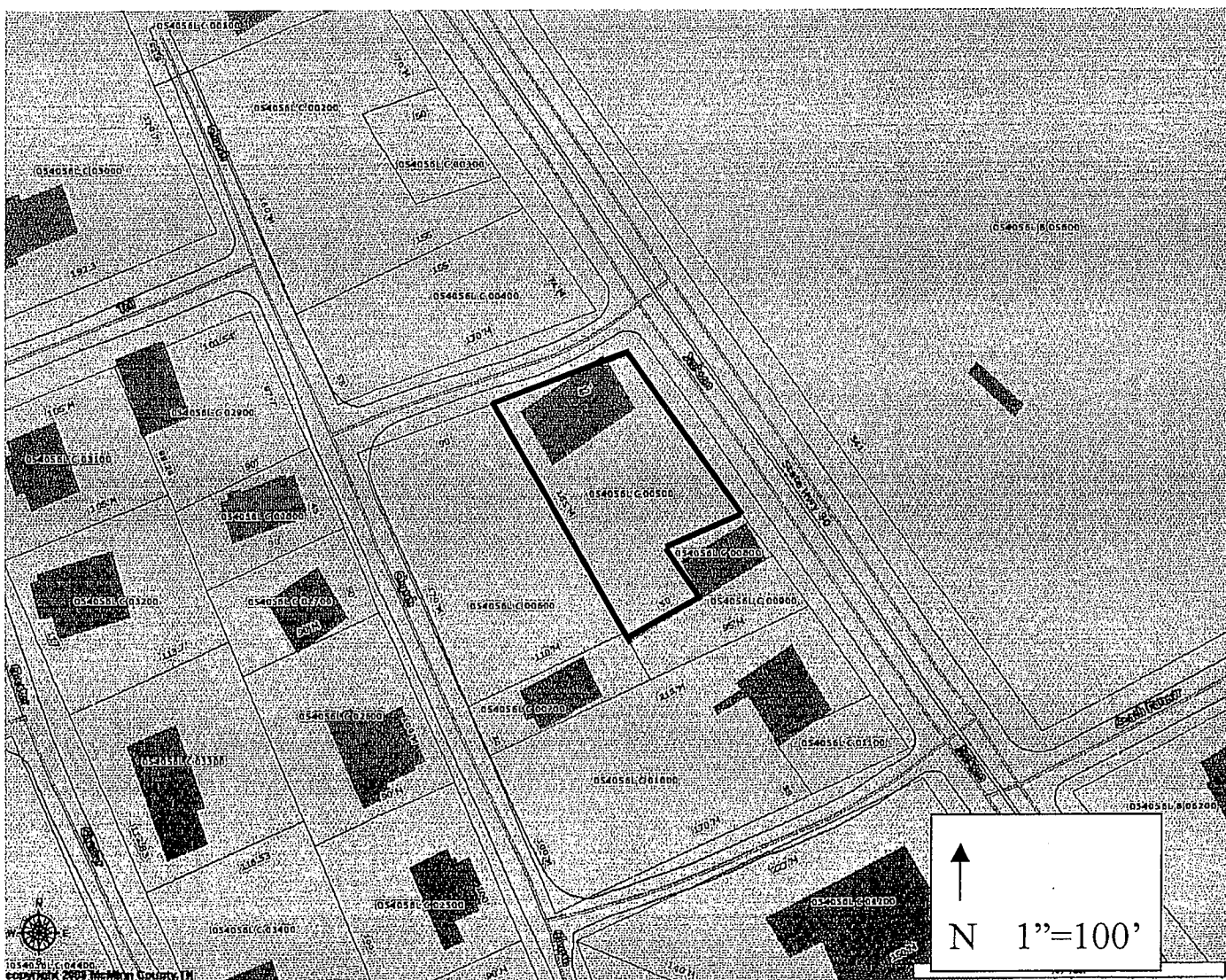
"The Athens Academy," *Athens Daily Post*, 1901 special edition. Athens Daily Post Microfilm: Feb.
1859- July 1920, Box 7, Cleveland, TN History Library.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal boundary description and boundary justification:

The First United Presbyterian Church is located off of North Jackson Street near the courthouse square in Athens, McMinn County, Tennessee. It is listed as Parcel 5 on McMinn County Tax Map 56L. The nominated boundaries contain the extant historic church structure on the 0.3 acre sloping lot at the intersection of North Jackson Street and Roy Street.



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First United Presbyterian Church
McMinn County, TN

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Paul Archambault
Southeast Tennessee Development District
1000 Riverfront Parkway
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402

Date: January 2008

Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

First United Presbyterian Church, east facade, facing west
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First United Presbyterian Church, east facade and south elevation, facing northwest
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First United Cumberland Presbyterian Church, south elevation, facing north
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First United Presbyterian Church, south and rear elevation, facing northeast
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First United Presbyterian Church, rear elevation, facing east
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First United Presbyterian Church, rear & north elevation, facing southeast
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First United Presbyterian Church, north elevation, facing south
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First United Presbyterian Church, view of northeast tower, facing southwest
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First United Presbyterian Church, view of southeast tower, facing northwest
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First United Presbyterian Church, view of pointed arch, stained glass window (exterior) facing west
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Close-up of east façade, facing west
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First United Presbyterian Church, view of sanctuary and pulpit, west wall, facing west
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First United Presbyterian Church, view of sanctuary and nave window, east wall, facing northeast
13 of 14

First United Presbyterian Church, view of pointed arch, stained glass window (interior), facing east
14 of 14